

Message Text

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R 240845Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6803

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 3 RABAT 5138

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, SS, MO

SUBJECT: ATHERTON'S REMARKS TO THE PRESS ON SPANISH SAHARA OCT 22

1. GIVEN WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY AND PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT ATHERTON'S VISIT TO MOROCCO, HE DECIDED IT WAS BETTER TO MEET WITH THE PRESS IN ORDER TO PUT HIS VISIT IN PERSPECTIVE AND COUNTER SPECULATION THAT HE WAS HERE TO ACT AS MEDIATOR IN SPANISH SAHARA DISPUTE. LARGE NUMBER OF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, INCLUDING MAJOR US NEWSPAPERS AND ALL TELEVISION NETWORKS, HAVE CONVERGED ON MARRAKECH AND BEGAN PRESSING EVEN BEFORE ATHERTON'S ARRIVAL FOR A MEETING WITH HIM. HE DECLINED TO HAVE ANY PRESS CONTACTS, OTHER THAN BLAND REMARKS ON ARRIVAL, UNTIL AFTER AUDIENCE WITH KING AND OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS WITH KING LINE HE PROPOSED TO TAKE. HE MADE CLEAR HE WAS NOT HOLDING FORMAL "PRESS CONFERENCE" BUT WAS MAKING HIMSELF AVAILABLE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AND TO GIVE CLARIFICATIONS ABOUT HIS VISIT. GROUNDS RULES WERE "ON THE RECORD" BUT WITHOUT CAMERA, WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT IF HE SAID ANYTHING THEY CONSIDERED WORTH IT, NETWORKS COULD REPEAT RELEVANT QUESTIONS FOR ANSWERS ON CAMERAS AFTERWARDS. ABC AND NBC DID NOT PURSUE THIS, BUT CBS INSISTED ON ASKING SERIES OF PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS WHICH APPEAR AT END OF FOLLOWING TRANSCRIPT,

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WHICH IS TAKEN FROM UNEDITED TAPE.

2. (BEGIN TRANSCRIPT)

I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO A QUIET UNHERALDED UNPUBLICIZED VISIT TO MOROCCO TO DO A LITTLE SIGHTSEEING AND TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE ONE OF THE COUNTRIES IN MY REGION AND TO HAVE A MEETING WITH HIS MAJESTY FOR A GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND I WANT TO PUT IT IN THIS CONTEXT BECAUSE ACTUALLY MY TRIP HAS BEEN PLANNED FOR SOME TIME. I STARTED BY GOING TO TUNISIA TO HEAD OUR DELEGATION TO THE JOINT US-TUNISIAN ECONOMIC COMMISSION AND SINCE I WAS GOING THERE ANYWAY, THE SECRETARY SUGGESTED THAT I MIGHT EXTEND MY VISIT TO GO ALSO TO ALGERIA AND TO MOROCCO. HE SUGGESTED TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF ALGERIA AND MOROCCO THAT I WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO MEET WITH THEIR LEADERS AND DISCUSS MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST AS THEY WISHED AND THEY ACCEPTED AND THEREFORE THE TRIP WAS PLANNED IN THAT CONTEXT. CLEARLY THE DEVELOPMENTS WITH RESPECT TO THE SAHARA HAVE EVOLVED IN THE PERIOD SINCE MY TRIP WAS PLANNED AND HAVE GIVEN IT AN INTEREST THAT IT MIGHT OTHERWISE NOT HAVE HAD. I HAVE HAD A VERY GOOD BROAD-GUAGE WIDE RANGING MEETING WITH HIS MAJESTY. I WAS VERY HONORED TO BE RECEIVED BY HIM ON BEHALF OF SECRETARY KISSINGER. WE DISCUSSED A NUMBER OF MATTERS PRINCIPALLY AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ALSO OF COURSE AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WITH RESPECT TO THE SAHARA. WE DID THIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONTINUING DIALOGUE THAT WE HAVE HAD IN THE SPIRIT OF THE VERY CLOSE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN MOROCCO AND THE UNITED STATES. THESE EXCHANGES OF VIEWS ARE PART OF THAT RELATIONSHIP AND ARE A CONTINUING PROCESS OF WHICH THIS WAS SIMPLY A PART. I WOULD BE VERY HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT I COULD ANSWER AT THIS MOMENT.

3. Q. MAY I ASK YOU SIR IF YOU SEE ANY WAY OUT OF THIS CRISIS WHICH WILL PREVENT THE MARCHERS CROSSING THE BORDER INTO THE WESTERN SAHARA?

A. WELL, AS YOU KNOW THE WHOLE QUESTION IS BEING CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN NEW YORK AT THE PRESENT TIME AND I THINK ANY EXPRESSION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF US GOVERNMENT VIEWS OR POSITIONS IN THAT REGARD REALLY HAVE TO BE MADE IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW YORK.

Q. I FIGURED MR. ATHERTON THAT THE SECRETARY'S REQUEST THAT YOU GO TO ALGERIA AND MOROCCO CAME AFTER THE CRISIS HAD ARISEN.

A. NO, THAT IS THE POINT I WANT TO MAKE VERY CLEARLY. THAT REQUEST WAS MADE BEFORE THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WHICH HAVE FOCUSSED SO MUCH ATTENTION

ON THE SAHARA.

Q. DID YOU BRING ANY MESSAGES, ORAL OR WRITTEN,
FROM THE SECRETARY TO EITHER THE GOVERNMENTS OF
MOROCCO OR (INAUDIBLE)?

A. I CONVEYED VIEWS FROM THE SECRETARY ON THESE
QUESTIONS AS WOULD BE NORMAL AND EXPECTED. I AM
HERE AT HIS REQUEST AND REPRESENTING HIM.

Q. SIR, CAN YOU TELL US (INAUDIBLE) NOW THAT THE QUESTION
IS WITH THE SECURITY COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS.
CAN YOU GIVE US SOME IDEA WHAT THE AMERICAN POINT
OF VIEW IS IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL (INAUDIBLE) ON THE SPANISH
SAHARA. WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DO IN THE UNITED NATIONS?

A. WE HAVE NOT YET SPOKEN IN THE UNITED NATIONS.
AT LEAST NOT ACCORDING TO MY LATEST INFORMATION. AS
A GENERAL STATEMENT OUR POSITION WITH REGARD
TO THE SAHARA PROBLEM HAS FOR SOME TIME BEEN
THAT WE DO NOT HAVE A US POSITION ON THE SUBSTANCE
OF THE QUESTION. WE HAVE EXPRESSED THE HOPE IN
OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH PARTIES, AND I THINK ONE HAS TO
KEEP IN MIND THAT WE ARE DEALING WITH A SITUATION
INVOLVING COUNTRIES WITH WHOM WE HAVE VERY CLOSE
BILATERAL, FRIENDLY RELATIONS-WE HAVE LONG
EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT A SOLUTION OF THIS DISPUTE
WILL BE FOUND IN AN AMICABLE WAY THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS.
THAT STILL REMAINS THE GENERAL EXPRESSION OF OUR
APPROACH.

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R 240845Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6804

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Q. DID THE KING GIVE YOU ANY INDICATIONS OF HIS WILLINGNESS (INAUDIBLE) TO NEGOTIATE (INAUDIBLE) BECAUSE THIS AFTERNOON WE WERE TALKING WITH ANOTHER REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT AND HE TOLD US THAT THERE WOULD BE NO NEGOTIATIONS WHATSOEVER. THERE WOULD BE NO COMPROMISE. THEY WOULD EITHER HAVE THE SPANISH SAHARA FOR THEMSELVES OR THEY WOULD MARCH IN AND HAVE IT TAKEN AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS FROM THERE. WAS THAT MORE OR LESS THE VIEW EXPRESSED TO YOU THIS AFTERNOON?

A. I DON'T REALLY THINK IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO INDICATE ANY OF THE THINGS THAT WERE SAID BY HIS MAJESTY IN THE COURSE OF A PRIVILEGED CONVERSATION. BUT I WOULD LIKE TO SAY AGAIN AS A GENERAL OBSERVATION THAT I THINK THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIPLOMACY ARE STILL OPEN.

Q. (INAUDIBLE) WHAT YOU SAID?

A. THIS IS MY JUDGMENT. I CAN'T DOCUMENT IT FOR YOU. THIS IS MY APPRAISAL OF THE SITUATION.

Q. WHAT DO YOU SEE THOSE OPTIONS TO BE?

A. I WOULD RATHER NOT FRANKLY GET INTO THE SPECIFICS OF THIS. I THINK THIS IS A SITUATION WHICH IS BEING DISCUSSED IN VARIOUS DIPLOMATIC FORUMS. I AM NOT THE ONLY VISITOR OBVIOUSLY WHO HAS BEEN HERE AND I THINK IN THE INTEREST OF THOSE DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS AND THE HOPES FOR AN OUTCOME THAT WILL BE SATISFACTORY TO ALL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONCERNED IT IS PROBABLY BETTER IF I NOT EXPRESS MYSELF ON ANYTHING THAT SPECIFIC.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, ONE OF THE CORRESPONDENTS HERE PRESENT YESTERDAY ASKED THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF MOROCCO WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE UN SEEKS SECURITY COUNCIL OR HALT. AND HIS ANSWER WAS RHETORICAL. HE SAID WHO CAN STOP THE PEOPLE. HOW WOULD YOU COMMENT ON THAT? CAN YOU STOP THIS MARCH ONCE IT GETS STARTED?

A. I REALLY THINK I HAVE NO COMMENT. I AM SORRY.

Q. DID YOU EXPRESS THE VIEW TO HIS MAJESTY THAT THE UNITED STATES IS NOT TAKING A POSITION ON THE QUESTION OR AT THE OTHER EXTREME, DID YOU OFFER THE GOOD OFFICES OF THE UNITED STATES?

A. WE HAVE ON MANY OCCASIONS IN OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PARTIES INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT OF MOROCCO STATED OUR POSITION THAT WE DO NOT TAKE A POSITION ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE QUESTION. THIS IS NOT NEW. WHAT WAS THE SECOND PART OF YOUR QUESTION?

Q. DID THE UNITED STATES OFFER TO BE INVOLVED?

A. WE ARE NOT IN A MEDIATING ROLE IN THIS SITUATION.

Q. HAVE YOU GOTTEN IN TOUCH WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE SINCE THE MOROCCAN AFFAIR STARTED AND DURING

YOUR TRIP ON THE (INAUDIBLE).

A. THE DAY THE SECRETARY LEFT WASHINGTON, HE HAD A MEETING WITH THE MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON AND I WAS PRESENT AT THAT MEETING. I LEFT THE SAME EVENING. THIS WAS FRIDAY EVENING OF LAST WEEK SO THAT BY THAT TIME THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAD ALREADY OF COURSE OCCURRED. THAT WAS THE 17TH I BELIEVE OF OCTOBER THAT THE MEETING TOOK PLACE WITH THE MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR. AND I HAVE TO SAY I AM IN FAIRLY CONSTANT TOUCH WITH THE SECRETARY AS I TRAVEL AND AS HE TRAVELS.

Q. YOU SPEAK OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS OF (INAUDIBLE). IS IT FEASIBLE THAT THE UNITED STATES MIGHT ASSUME A NEGOTIATING OR MEDIATING ROLE IN SOME WAY?

A. I DON'T SEE THAT. NO, OUR ROLE IS ONE OF TRYING TO BE HELPFUL WHERE WE CAN IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES BUT AT THIS POINT I DO NOT ENVISAGE OUR ASSUMING ANY MEDIATOR ROLE OF ANY KIND.
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Q. MR. ATHERTON, DID THE KING GIVE THE UNITED STATES ANY ADVANCE (INAUDIBLE)?

A. I FRANKLY THINK THAT'S IN THE REALM OF OUR PRIVATE DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES. I'M AFRAID THAT I CAN'T GET INTO THAT.

Q. COULD YOU GIVE US ANY INFORMATION ON GENERALISIMO FRANCO?

A. I'M AFRAID I AM NOT UP TO DATE ON THAT. I HAVE BEEN ON THE MOVE A LOT.

Q. CAN YOU GIVE ANY COMMENT ON PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SAHARA CRISIS OR PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE'S ATTITUDES ON THE MIDDLE EAST AS A RESULT OF YOUR TALK WITH HIM.

A. WELL AGAIN, OF COURSE, THIS WAS A PRIVATE CONVERSATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SAME KIND OF ON-GOING DIALOGUE WE HAVE HAD WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF ALGERIA FOR THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS. IT DID COVER THE MIDDLE EAST. WE DISCUSSED IT IN GENERAL TERMS. WE ALSO DISCUSSED THE SAHARA QUESTION QUITE OBVIOUSLY. I CAN'T REALLY SPEAK FOR PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE BUT I THINK ONE HAS SEEN THE POSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ALGERIA EXPRESSED IN ITS OWN GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL STATEMENTS.

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R 240845Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6805

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Q. HAVING TALKED TO THE (INAUDIBLE) COULD YOU TELL US (INAUDIBLE) NATURE OF THE

A. I SAID EARLIER I THINK THAT THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIPLOMACY HAVE NOT BEEN EXHAUSTED AND I WOULD GIVE THAT ANSWER ALSO TO YOUR QUESTION.

Q. ON ANOTHER SUBJECT, SIR, IS THERE ANYTHING THE UNITED STATES CAN SAY OR DO NOW TO HELP EASE THE LEBANESE CRISIS? I SUPPOSE YOU PROBABLY DISCUSSED THIS WITH BOTH PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE AND KING HASSAN.

A. WELL THIS IS PART OF THE AREA SITUATION REALLY AND IT IS A SUBJECT THAT COMES UP IN OUR NORMAL EXCHANGES OF VIEWS WITH THESE GOVERNMENTS AND WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS IN THE AREA. WE HAVE SAID BEFORE, AND I WOULD UNDERLINE IT TODAY, THAT WE OBVIOUSLY FOLLOW THE DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON VERY CLOSELY AND WE'VE ALWAYS HAD VERY CLOSE FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH LEBANON. OUR POLICY HAS BEEN AND REMAINS THAT WE SUPPORT VERY STRONGLY THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF LEBANON AND THE COHESION AND NATIONAL UNITY OF LEBANON AND WE WISH IT WELL IN ITS EFFORTS TO RESTORE STABILITY INTERNALLY.

Q. IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS CRISIS DO YOU FORESEE ANY (INAUDIBLE) IN MADRID?

A. NO I DON'T AT THE MOMENT FORESEE ANY (INAUDIBLE)

Q. CAN YOU TELL US WHAT YOUR PLANS MAY BE SIR TO TRAVEL ON ANYWHERE?

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A. MY PRESENT PLANS ARE JUST WHAT THEY WERE WHEN I FIRST PLANNED THIS TRIP AND WHEN I LEFT WASHINGTON, WHICH ARE TO STAY IN MOROCCO THROUGH TOMORROW AND LEAVE ON FRIDAY FOR WASHINGTON. I HAVE TO GET BACK FOR THE

VISIT OF PRESIDENT SADAT WHICH BEGINS THIS WEEKEND. THIS IS ONE OF THE COUNTRIES THAT WAS RECENTLY ADDED TO MY AREA OF JURISDICTION IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND IT'S THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY I'VE HAD TO COME FOR ANY KIND OF A VISIT OTHER THAN A VERY SHORT STOP WITH DR. KISSINGER IN THE PAST AND I WANTED TO GET TO KNOW OUR EMBASSY AND OUR EMBASSY PEOPLE BETTER AND TO GET TO KNOW THE COUNTRY BETTER.

Q. DO YOU EXPECT TO SEE THE KING AGAIN TOMORROW?

A. THERE ARE NO PRESENT PLANS FOR ANOTHER AUDIENCE WITH HIS MAJESTY.

Q. MR. UNDER SECRETARY, BASED ON YOUR CONVERSATION WITH THE KING, IS IT YOUR IMPRESSION THAT 350,000 PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MARCH INTO THE SPANISH SAHARA NO MATTER WHAT.

A. THE WHOLE QUESTION OF THE SAHARA SITUATION IS PRESENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN NEW YORK AND I THINK ANY ANSWERS ON THIS OR ANY COMMENTS ON THIS REALLY HAVE TO BE MADE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

Q. BASED ON YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH THE KING, DO YOU THINK FRANCO'S HEALTH WILL HAVE ANY BEARING ON WHETHER OR NOT THESE PEOPLE MARCH INTO THE SPANISH SAHARA?

A. THIS IS NOT A SUBJECT THAT I FRANKLY FEEL COMPETENT TO COMMENT ON. AS FAR AS MY CONVERSATION WITH THE KING IS CONCERNED I REALLY DON'T FEEL THAT IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO GET INTO THE SUBSTANCE OF IT.

Q. 350,000 PEOPLE PLAN TO MARCH INTO AN AREA THE SIZE OF ILLINOIS AND OHIO COMBINED AND JUST TAKE IT OVER. IS THE UNITED STATES' POSITION TO DO NOTHING?

A. OUR POSITION ON THIS PROBLEM HAS BEEN STATED QUITE CLEARLY FOR SOME TIME. WE ARE NOT A PARTY TO THE DISPUTE, WE HAVE VERY CLOSE FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COUNTRIES WHICH ARE INVOLVED. WE HAVE NOT TAKEN A POSITION AS A GOVERNMENT ON THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES INVOLVED, BUT WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS AND OUR PRIVATE DIALOGUES EXPRESSED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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THE HOPE THAT WAYS CAN BE FOUND TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM AMICABLY AND THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS.

Q. IN OTHER WORDS THE U.S. WILL DO NOTHING.

A. THE U.S. IS IN ACTIVE DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUE WITH THE PARTIES CONCERNED. (END TRSNSCRIPT)
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